

Development of Islamic Work-Family Balance Model Based on Spouses' Character

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Abstract

This study presents the development of an Islamic work-family balance model tailored to the characteristics of married couples in Malaysia, utilizing the Design and Development Research (DDR) methodology. The issue of work-family balance is especially persistent in modern societies, where the demands of work often compete with the needs of family life, creating a need for models that can guide couples in achieving a sustainable balance. The research methodology comprises of three phases. The initial phase comprises of needs analysis, in which thematic analysis is applied to interviews with three experts to ascertain the necessity of constructing an Islamic work-family balance model based on the spousal characteristics. The second phase centers on model development through a structured Focus Group Discussion (FGD) approach, incorporating the perspectives of ten domain experts, primarily from the field of family studies. This phase is essential in refining the model's design and ensuring its relevance to both theoretical and practical contexts. The final phase involves a comprehensive evaluation of the model to assess its applicability, and alignment with Islamic values and principles. The outcome of this research is a developed, expert-validated work-family balance model tailored to the unique dynamics of married Muslim couples, offering a significant contribution to both academic scholarship and practical implementation in the field of family studies.

Keywords: Work-Family Balance, Character, Model, Model Development Method

Introduction

Personal values and virtues typically serve as guiding principles influencing an individual's behavior across significant domains of human existence. Notably, al-Ghazali (1982), a prominent Muslim scholar, posited that an individual's character (*shakhsiyyah*) encompasses both internal attributes and external actions directed towards God, fellow human beings, and nature as a whole. Consequently, marriage serves as a union between two individuals with distinct values and virtues, potentially influencing the dynamics of their relationship.

Throughout the marital journey, the personality traits of couples and their capacity for self-adjustment dynamically interact as they endeavor to foster compatibility, articulate aspirations and future plans, navigate stressful situations and conflicts, and effectively manage household responsibilities.

In relation to that, Kirchmeyer (2000) defines work and life balance as the attainment of fulfilling experiences across diverse life facets, necessitating the allocation of resources such as energy, time, and commitment. These resources are distributed among various domains, encompassing not only professional and familial aspects but also extending to broader roles like community, social, religious, and leisure commitments undertaken by individuals (Khateeb, 2021). In comparison to the analogous term work-family balance, the former incorporates a more comprehensive array of roles beyond familial responsibilities. The contemporary landscape introduces an escalating challenge in achieving work-life balance, with the difficulty arising from the intricate task of reconciling the demands of professional commitments with those of other life domains. In the discipline of work-life balance, a series of theories has been presented throughout its historical development, each seeking to explicate the intricacies of this phenomenon.

Literature Review

A growing body of empirical work on the work–family interface has investigated the effects of various work–life constructs on work and non-work outcomes. For the purpose of this research, the discussions are themed as the following:

Work and family conflicts

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) referred to career conflict as a conflict between roles, demanding time, energy, and behavior for both work and family responsibilities. A study by Schwartzberg and Dytell (1996) involving 94 wives and 48 husbands with dual-career partners showed similar levels of family stress and psychological wellbeing, even though wives reported higher levels of perceived task imbalance by their husbands. According to Schwartzberg, the mental health of dual-career spouses is affected by both work and family pressures, and a lack of task-sharing by husbands significantly predicts depression among working mothers. Frone (2003) argued that achieving work-family balance helps reduce role conflict. He acknowledged that various roles as an employee and a parent can lead to high stress levels, affecting individuals' quality of life. Psychological pressure experienced by individuals can also reduce marital quality and cause tension between partners. Studies also indicate that role conflict is related to adjustments in accepting partner attitudes in marriage.

The increasing participation of women in the workforce has also brought about significant changes in traditional gender roles, particularly in the context of motherhood. According to Redshaw and Martin (2010), working mothers often experience heightened levels of stress due to the perceived inability to fulfill conventional expectations associated with full-time motherhood. This role conflict not only affects their emotional wellbeing but also impacts their self-perception, leading to diminished self-esteem. Societal expectations further exacerbate this issue, as the idea of an ideal mother and wife who can seamlessly balance professional responsibilities with domestic duties—creates additional pressure and contributes to role confusion. Redshaw and Martin's findings underscore the importance of external support in mitigating the negative psychological effects of this role conflict. The

emotional wellbeing of working mothers can be significantly enhanced through task sharing within the household, as well as through active support from family members. Spousal involvement in domestic chores and childcare, for instance, not only helps alleviate the burden on working mothers but also fosters a more equitable distribution of responsibilities. Moreover, societal recognition of the value of shared parenting can contribute to a more supportive environment, allowing working mothers to navigate their roles with greater confidence and reduced stress.

For younger mothers, the challenges of navigating these conflicting roles are particularly pronounced. During the early stages of motherhood, women are tasked with adapting to the physical, emotional, and psychological demands of raising children while simultaneously managing career expectations. This period of life transition can amplify feelings of inadequacy, particularly when societal norms emphasize the importance of being constantly present for one's children, a notion that is often at odds with the realities of working life. Consequently, many young working mothers may experience a sense of failure or frustration when they are unable to meet the competing demands of their professional and familial roles.

In Malaysia, a study conducted by Mohd Noor Jais (1996) on 100 Malay professional women with university qualifications in the corporate sector showed that executive women do not experience significant role conflict. This is attributed to their strong support system at home, including support from husbands, children, and domestic helpers. However, other studies by Abdullah (1985), Omar (2003), Abu Bakar (2012), Putung and Basir (2017) reported that working women face challenges in managing households due to time constraints and extensive workloads both at the workplace and at home. To cope with these challenges, women use various strategies, including delegating tasks to others, hiring domestic helpers, hiring others at specific times, and seeking support from spouses and children. Studies show that the role and involvement of husbands in household chores become crucial when women start working. Zakaria et al. (2018) identified the relationship between role conflict, social support, and emotional wellbeing among dual-role women in the Lembah Klang region. With 283 respondents participating in the study, significant associations were found between role conflict, social support, and emotional wellbeing among dual-role women. It indicates that high role conflict and low social support can reduce emotional wellbeing. Therefore, it is crucial for dual-role women to learn methods and solutions to reduce the encountered role conflicts while simultaneously obtaining high social support. Effective coping strategies may serve as mediators to enhance their emotional wellbeing.

Characters of ideal spouses in Islam

Islam, as a comprehensive religion, provides guidance in resolving conflicting priorities, such as career and family priorities. Islam also offers guidance on the holistic characteristics and criteria for choosing partners, starting from the early stages of partner selection. Islam places pious women as the primary basis for selecting a wife, alongside considerations of physical beauty, lineage, and wealth. In addition to the above criteria, Al-Tahtawi (2005) added criteria for a good environment that fosters noble qualities in women and the responsibility of the guardian to choose a spouse who is religious and virtuous for his daughter. The characteristics of a partner playing a role in creating a harmonious and blessed household focus on building character through the partner's personality and religious approach. In constructing the

character of a husband, Islam emphasizes the *qawwamah* characteristic mentioned in Surah An-Nisa' verse 34, symbolizing leadership, responsibility, benevolence, and consideration. Among interpretations, al-Tabari (1997) defined *qawwam* as a task executor (*nafiz al-amr*) and protector, regulating and providing an example and education to the wife. Holistic partner character building in line with Islamic guidance in dual-career families can reduce role conflict, ultimately achieving a well-balanced life.

Work-family balance

Research related to work-family balance (WFB) has been pioneered by studies in the West, but lately, it has begun to receive attention in Malaysia. Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) define WFB as the level at which an individual is satisfactorily engaged in balancing the responsibilities of work and family life, expressing contentment with it. Hence, employees with good WFB are those who exhibit a balanced commitment across the domains of work, life, and family (Kalliath T. et al., 2008). Studies have also shown that complex job demands affect overall wellbeing (McGinnity et al., 2008; Greenhaus et al. 2003). According to Marks and MacDermid (1996) individual's ability to balance life, family, and career plays a crucial role in achieving satisfaction in family life and improving health. In summary, recent research on WFB tends to suggest that the balance between life and career significantly influences overall wellbeing.

Salazar and Nguyen (2019), in their study involving 2150 respondents consisting of married couples and cohabitating partners, found a positive correlation between work-life balance and satisfaction with the partner's willingness to listen. The study indicates that individuals who believe their partners show interest in listening when discussing important issues are more satisfied with their relationships. Furthermore, when an individual can achieve a balance between work and life, it provides emotional support in stressful situations. In a study by Park (2018), spousal support was identified as a mediator in the relationship between work-family conflict and psychological wellbeing. The respondents in the study were a group of 300 working mothers in Seoul, aged below 50, and with at least one child. The study also found that higher psychological wellbeing is associated with strong support from spouses. There are also studies linking religious approaches to the ability to cope with work-life conflicts. Pandey and Sigh (2016) examined the influence of an individual's ability to cope with problems using religious coping on work-family conflict and career satisfaction. Data collected from activists in India showed that religious coping reduces work-family conflict and enhances career satisfaction.

In the Malaysian context, a study by Hamzah et al. (2015) on seven outstanding public sector employees concluded that opportunities, open employer attitudes, and commitment from family members, especially husbands, are key to nurturing successful women. Ismail (2017) presented the concepts of *al-tadayyun*, *wasatiyyah*, and *maqasid* in managing family and organizational careers. A study conducted at the University Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia (Muda, et.al, 2019) measured work-life balance (WLB) impact on 121 female staff members, revealing that a balanced integration of work and personal life significantly enhances their overall quality of life. In the study, three domains of work-life balance were assessed: work with life intervention, life with work intervention, and improvement in life and work. The study showed that work-life balance has a significant impact on the quality of life. The relationship between WLB and WFB is complex, as both involve managing the interface

between work and personal life. While WLB encompasses a broader spectrum of life roles beyond family, WFB focuses specifically on the family aspect. Researchers have noted that an employee's mental conceptualizations of work-family roles can differ from actual role enactment, highlighting the dynamic nature of these balances (Maertz, 2011).

Therefore, based on previous studies in the related theme, work-family balance is a pivotal factor affecting the quality of life for women employees. It is evident that research on work-family balance has become a focal point and is highly relevant in today's contemporary world. The challenges of managing a career have become more significant in families where both spouses are employed. Literature reviews also indicate that studies often concentrate on the general concept of 'work-family balance,' with a predominant focus on women as individuals involved in careers. However, there remains a research gap in the domain of 'work-family balance,' particularly studies that center on the roles of both partners as working individuals aiming to achieve balance in both the career and family life domains. In addressing role conflicts for dual-career couples, the characters of the partners become a focal point for alleviating pressure in both the workplace and at home, ultimately enhancing overall wellbeing. Thus, the present study will examine the need for constructing a work-family balance model based on characteristics and to develop such a model.

Development of Islamic Work-Family Balance Model Based on Spouses' Character

In developing the research model, the methodology of research employed is as the following:

i. Study Design

Generally, the design of this study utilizes the Design and Development Research (DDR) approach. This approach is based on Richey and Klein's (2007) assertion that developmental research encompasses a highly systematic and systematic process involving the design, development, and evaluation of a produced product. The construction of the model in this study is designed and developed based on three phases or stages, namely Phase 1 - needs analysis, Phase 2 - design and development of the model, and Phase 3 - usability evaluation of the model adapted Siraj et al. (2013).

ii. Data Collection

The data collection method to be used in this study is based on the phases or stages in the DDR design involving needs analysis, design and development of the model, and usability evaluation of the model. The details are as follows:

Phase 1 - Needs Analysis

The needs analysis phase aims to achieve objectives 1 and 2, which are the issues and needs of a work-family balance model in order to cater the marital conflicts and preserve the family institution. The data collection method to be used is through in-depth interviews to obtain data related to the issues and needs to develop model on work-family balance. The informants for these interviews are experts and stakeholders from public universities in Malaysia, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), and Department of Religious Affairs Terengganu (JHEAT). Apart from that, document analysis of literature is also used, including journals, books, and official documents related to the concept ideal spousal characters and Islamic guidelines on achievement on family wellbeing in Islam. Document analysis is crucial for obtaining previous studies that may address issues closely related to

spouses' ideal characters in Islam for the construction of a model to achieve the research objectives.

Phase 2: Design & Development of Literature Review

This phase encompasses multiple processes essential for crafting a support model aimed at enhancing work-family balance, particularly tailored to the character-oriented dynamics of spouses in Malaysia. The initial step in the design phase involves conducting a comprehensive literature review, which serves to identify the core components and elements integral to the model's development. This review not only synthesizes existing research but also highlights gaps and opportunities for innovation within the context of Malaysian family dynamics.

Following the literature review, the identified components undergo validation process facilitated by a panel of experts who possess significant expertise in relevant fields. This validation is crucial as it ensures that the model is grounded in empirical evidence and expert consensus. The assessment typically occurs through face-to-face meetings, allowing for in-depth discussions and nuanced feedback that can refine the model's structure.

Once the validation of these components is complete, the development process commences. This stage is predicated on the consensus reached among the expert group, which guides the formulation of a robust support model. The development process is collaborative, involving additional experts who contribute insights into the driving forces that will underpin the model's effectiveness. These driving forces are critical as they inform how well the model can be integrated into real-world applications, ensuring it resonates with the target demographic.

To facilitate this collaborative effort, workshops are organized where experts engage in discussions and brainstorming sessions. These workshops not only foster a sense of community among professionals but also enhance creativity and innovation in developing practical solutions for work-family balance challenges faced by spouses in Malaysia. The face-to-face format of these meetings allows for dynamic interactions, leading to richer insights and more comprehensive outcomes.

Ultimately, this structured approach rooted in literature review, expert validation, and collaborative development aims to create a support model that is not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable. By focusing on character orientation and incorporating diverse expert perspectives, the model aspires to effectively address the unique challenges of work-family balance within Malaysian households, thereby contributing positively to both individual wellbeing and family dynamics.

iii. Sampling Method and Selection of Respondents

To ensure the achievement of the research objectives, the selection of informants for the purpose of interviews generally utilizes purposive sampling to obtain information related to the issues and needs of a work-family balanced model. In the context of the study, the participant criteria are as follows:

1. Experts in the field of Islamic family law & family policy from the public university in Malaysia
2. Stakeholders from the Family, Social, and Community Division
3. Stakeholders from Marriage, Divorce & Reconciliation Division

The selection of these respondent demonstrates the diversity of experiences they have undergone. Therefore, purposive sampling is highly relevant for use in qualitative research (Mohd Mursyid, 2016). The list of informants for semi-structured interview is as the following table:

Table 1
List of Semi-Structured Interview Informants

Informant	Expertise /Description	Organisation/Agency	Number of informant
Professor	Islamic Family Law & Policy	Public University in Malaysia	1
Chief Deputy Director	Family, Social, and Community Division	Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM)	1
Deputy Commissioner	Chief Marriage, Divorce & Reconciliation	Department of Religious Affairs Terengganu (JHEAT)	1

In Phase 2, which focuses on the design and development of the proposed model, a carefully selected panel of 10 experts participated in a focus group discussion (FGD). The inclusion of these experts is intended to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the model, drawing on their specialized knowledge and experience to enhance the model's rigor and applicability. This approach underscores the commitment to producing academically sound framework. The criteria and characteristics of experts chosen as subjects for this study are suitable for the study context because they involve experts in the field (Rosnaini, 2006; Mohd Ridhuan, 2016). The selection of experts for the design and development phase of the model is as follows:

1. Subject Matter Experts. Subject matter experts include Islamic family law (*ahwal al-syakhsyyah*), Islamic studies, family policy and wellbeing based on the needs for the formation of a work-family balanced model based on the spouses' characters.
2. Policy makers
3. Implementers

The list of informants for semi-structured interview is as the following table:

Table 1

List of Focus Group Discussion participants

No.	Participant	Expertise /Description	Organisation/Agency	Number of Participant
1.	Professor	Family wellbeing	Public University in Malaysia	3
2.	Senior Lecturer	Social Anthropology	Public University in Malaysia	1
3.	Chief Deputy Director	Marriage & Family Development Division	Department of Islamic Religious Affairs Federal Territory (JAWI)	1
4.	Senior Deputy Director	Marriage & Family Development Division	Department of Islamic Religious Affairs Federal Territory (JAWI)	2
5.	Deputy Chief Commissioner	Marriage, Divorce & Reconciliation	Department of Religious Affairs Terengganu (JHEAT)	2
6.	Chief Deputy Director	Family Development Division	Terengganu Family Development Foundation (YPKT)	1

In Phase 3, which entails the evaluation of the model, two academic experts specializing in family studies, psychology, and family counseling were consulted. Their expertise is crucial in providing informed, critical feedback to ensure the model's effectiveness and relevance within these interdisciplinary fields.

iv. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis refers to the interview sessions, transcription, and document analysis conducted with the study subjects. The proposed model is developed using the DDR approach, comprising three phases: first, the needs analysis phase; second, the design and development of the model; and third, the evaluation of the model.

Data from the needs analysis phase which was collected through interviews was then analysed through content analysis method. Analysis of interview data involves organizing what is asked, heard, and seen so that the findings are meaningful. It involves three simultaneous activities: data reduction, data presentation, and making conclusions or verifications.

Each interview is audio recorded, and to assist researchers in analyzing the data, the recordings are transcribed verbatim into written form. Following the transcription process, the data is systematically organized to identify themes and categories using predefined codes. This process is conducted manually, allowing for a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the data in relation to the research questions. By repeatedly reading the transcripts, researchers can immerse themselves in the participants' contexts and meanings. Manual coding offers greater flexibility, as it allows researchers to adapt to the nuances of the data

rather than being constrained by predefined categories or rules. This approach also enhances the trustworthiness and transparency of the analysis by enabling researchers to clearly explain and justify their coding decisions, showing how they directly relate to the data. The data analysis is conducted using thematic or inductive methods, as the research questions are framed around themes aligned with the study's objectives.

The analysis process involved identifying the respondents' views and reporting them exactly as stated in the interviews. Subsequently, themes were identified based on the research questions that formed the foundation of the study. The respondents' views were then classified, and response themes were generated. Any themes that were found to have similarities or overlap were merged under the same theme. Iterative readings were conducted until the researcher was confident that they represented the most suitable themes to address the research questions.

The results of the field data analysis served as the foundation for designing the work-life balance model based on the characteristics of the spouses. The model-building process utilized the Design Development Research (DDR) method to systematically test and validate each feature that contributes to shaping the work-life balance model, ensuring it aligns with the specific attributes of the spouses involved.

Conclusion

Achieving a balance between work and family life is crucial in the family context, as it contributes to the wellbeing and satisfaction of both spouses. Research emphasizes that conflicts and stress among the marriage partners can negatively impact the family wellbeing, highlighting the importance of this research. Thus, work-life balance initiatives serve as mutually beneficial tools for both the marital as well as the family institutions in general particular. The output model of this present research which is the outcome of vigorous sources; document analysis, interviews with experts and stakeholders and focus group discussion, will facilitate towards a holistic work-family balance model based on spouses' character.

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